THE Champagne-Marne, the Aisne-Marne, the Oise-Aisne, the Meuse-Argonne—today these names are largely forgotten. But sixty years ago they were the names given to some of the major campaigns of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. A key AEF unit in these campaigns was the 28th Division, organized around the Pennsylvania National Guard and popularly known as the Keystone Division. Called into federal service in July 1917, the Keystone Division trained at Camp Hancock, Augusta, Georgia, until April 1918, when it left for France. Entering the line in late June 1918, the division helped stop Germany’s last desperate grasp for victory at the Marne River and was a spearhead in the Franco-American advance from the Marne to the Vesle River. During August 1918, the division held the deadly Fismes sector, and in late September and early October it helped smash the Hindenburg Line during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. At the war’s end, on 11 November 1918, the division was operating in the Thi-au-court-Toul sector. Casualties in the division were high. Yet it never failed in its assignment and could be proud of the praise of Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard, commander of the American III Corps and later the American Second Army, that the “Division has always been a combat Division in every sense of the word.”

The details of the Keystone Division’s operations in World War I are capably related in 28th Division; Summary of Operations, and more

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extensively in *The Twenty-Eighth Division; Pennsylvania’s Guard in the World War.* But except for Hervey Allen’s *Toward the Flame*, which narrates the author’s experiences as a company officer with the 111th Infantry during the summer of 1918, and James A. Murrin’s *With the 112th in France*, which is as much a regimental history as a memoir, the personal side of the division and its men has not been told. In this respect the World War I letters of Philip C. Shoemaker are a valuable historical source. Deposited with the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and consisting of more than four dozen letters to family members, the Shoemaker letters provide a rather complete picture of the experiences of an individual Keystoner from training camp at Camp Hancock through the war’s end. Their content shows an observant mind, with a succinct humor and strong religious strain throughout, and the fervor and sense of adventure that marked America’s participation in the Great War.

Philip C. Shoemaker was born in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, on 23 January 1896. In the spring of 1916, after studying agriculture at Pennsylvania State College for two and a half years, he joined the Boal Machine Gun Troop, a militia unit privately raised and funded by Theodore D. Boal, a wealthy land owner from Boalsburg. The troop consisted of ninety men from Centre, Clearfield, and Mifflin counties and was an outgrowth of the preparedness doctrine preached by Major General Leonard Wood. During the summer of 1916 the troop trained at Boal’s expense and in August 1916, now designated as Machine Gun Troop, First Pennsylvania Cavalry, was mustered into federal service and sent to the Mexican border to join the Pennsylvania National Guard at Camp Stewart, Texas. There Shoemaker had his first real taste of army life, although blowing sand rather than Pancho Villa proved to be the more exasperating enemy. In January 1917, the troop returned to Pennsylvania and was mustered out of federal service. It continued to train, however, and again was mustered into federal service in July 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson, war having been declared against Germany the previous April, called up the National Guard. Training at Camp Hancock followed, where Shoemaker’s troop became Company A, 107th Machine Gun Battalion. Shoemaker, who had

served as stable sergeant during the 1916 mobilization, was appointed a second lieutenant in the National Guard on 5 August 1917, and eight months later was promoted to first lieutenant.

In editing the letters I have omitted references to family affairs and matters not directly pertaining to the war. Corrections have been made in Shoemaker's spelling, but his phrasing and punctuation have been preserved.

THE LETTERS

Camp Hancock, Ga.
March 9, 1918

My dear Mother.

The Machine Gun Outfits started on the hike Monday, a little over 2,000 strong. I stayed back to take examinations. Monday eight of the officers from Machine Gun Units went out to the camp in a large truck. I was with them. When I arrived at camp my "dog" tent was up and waiting for me. It had been raining a little and I went to bed for several hours. Tuesday I came back for more examinations and went back again that afternoon. Our camp Monday and Tuesday was at the artillery range. Our tents were pitched on two side hills thinly populated with scrub oak and overlooking a beautiful lake some ½ mile in circumference. On another hill overlooking the same lake was camped one regiment of artillery; we could plainly see them shooting 11,000 yards away. To say the least sight was ideal and worth seeing. Monday night the men were singing and in front of every tent was a candle. It was great. The first days hike was 12½ miles.

At six oclock Tuesday night we left camp for Sandy Creek 14½ miles away. Starting out the wagon train was a head of us and we had to pass over some very rough roads. Several wagons stuck and caused a delay of about one hour. When the wagons did get started and the column tried to keep up with them, with the result that 17 men fell over from exhaustion in less time than it took the head of the column to go 100 yards. I am glad to state that this did not last long; for a mile more of it and this shavetail would have been lost along the road completely submerged in the sand by his pack. Aromastick spirits of ammonia and water soon brought around all of the 17 except 2 so that they were able to reach Sandy Creek by
six o'clock the next morning. Two of them were sent to the base hospital. The officer who caused the running of the column was more or less unpopular with both men and officers for the next few hours. We have now reached a better road and the column goes around the wagon train, which is one mile long. We would walk for 50 minutes and rest 10 every sixty, in this way we covered about 3 miles an hour. We walked and walked for hours and hours and still there was no sign of Sandy Creek. All this time the spirit of the men was wonderful, they were continually singing, making the best of it and it was mighty seldom that you heard them even curse the army, their pack, their feet or the dirty liar that said Sandy Creek was only 14½ miles from the Artillery Camp via our route of travel. About 3:30 A.M. Wednesday morning we left the road and went into a field where we pitched camp and in only a few minutes that, tired, foot-sore yet singing body of fine manly men was in dream land, the only happy land of the soldier. This place they called Sandy Creek was only a creek by name for there was not a drop of water within a mile and it had to be boiled before we could drink it.

Before retiring I washed my feet, thoroughly applied some foot powder to the poor things, put on clean socks and then I was in the soldiers happy land. Distance covered 18 miles (and they were blame long army miles.)

Wednesday I rested so did about everybody else. Distance covered by me three trips to the grub wagon and two trips to the straddle trenches.

Thursday at 2 A.M. we got up and at 3 A.M. we were moving forward. At 5 A.M. we stopped along a road to cook our own individual rather badly wanted breakfast, the men having only had a cup of coffee at 2:30. Eat we did most of the fires were built on the road, however, a few were kindled down a pine woods. . . . We were here for one hour then moved forward to fill our canteens. There the wagon train passed us. En route to water we passed man after man stretched out on the road, some singing while others were sleeping. Mules were also abundant and in a number of places a packed soldier was vainly trying to change a contrary mules idea of what might well be considered a breach of military etiquette. It took us about one hour to water. We then moved on, passing the wagon train a short distance from where we had watered. We got to camp about 11 A.M. pitched camp, and dinner was soon cooked. Again the sleepy soldiers go to sleep for only a short time for a most exciting circus is soon to commence. Distance covered 10½ miles.
Officers call is sounded several times and at the end of each double time is given. Orders are issued for all mounted men to take a bucket or a shovel and ride to the fire, started back there where we cooked breakfast. From every Co. street pour forth mules, riders and here and there comes a saddled horse, everything that can gallop is going to the fire, some mules have riders on their necks, others have them on their tails, while others have no riders they having been disposed of in the sand. Mules principally and men generally are seen everywhere, there are mules dashing thru the tents of the men while others are disturbing the quarters of the officers by madly tearing right thru the tents. Some mules are being ridden others are riderless. Now instead of going to the fire many of the mules are strewn over the country. Mules are going into the woods nearby, regardless of what their riders will. No circus ever pulled a better stunt, than the one staged by the mules, horses, men etc. of the machine gun units belonging to the 28th Division. The fire rages, the advance guard has arrived at the scene and is combating the fire. The excitement at the camp still continues, many mules have returned some riderless others are still mounted. They (the mules) have decided that they did not care to go to the fire and are returning to their picket lines. One platoon from each company is armed with blankets and marched to the fire. I accompany the platoon from Co. A 107th M.G. Bn. In less than an hour we arrive within a stone throws of the fire, but squads right about is given and we go back to camp, the advance guard having successfully outened the fire. The men continue to sing though tired and sore from the previous hike. Distance to the fire and return 8 hours.

Friday morning we cooked breakfast broke camp and started on our way to camp. At dinner time we ate a cold lunch and again went our way at 2.30 we reached our camp. I immediately took a nice hot bath. Distance covered 15 miles.

On the hike we went thru some of the best country in the state of Georgia. Many trees were in blossom and the grass was fast turning green. To the country we furnished some mules which preferred farming to soldiering.

At the end of each days hike I washed my feet as a result I was not the least bit troubled with sore feet and really stood the hike in the very best of shape.
My dear Martha [sister] . . .

The work here is very interesting, and we are kept very busy, but I like it very much.

I am attending grenade school, we use live grenades, as a result there is plenty of excitement.

There were three engineers killed here this week when a trench mortar shell exploded. We heard the explosion. . . .

My dear Mother,

Weather is hot, nothing new.

Am sending you a box via parcel post. Have no use for contents. Grenade with red trimmings is an American other is a French one, both are harmless.

Write to any one that is apt. to write to me and tell them not to do so for a while. You will discontinue to address my letters here. Will give you new address later. Will probably be away from here when you read this letter. . . .

During the third week of April 1918, the bulk of the Keystone Division was sent to Camp Merritt, New Jersey, and Camps Mills and Upton on Long Island. There, for approximately a week, the Keystoners were issued equipment and given physical examinations and then sent to New York City or Hoboken, New Jersey, for embarkation on troop transports. Shoemaker's battalion sailed from New York City on 3 May 1918, on the City of Calcutta, an English ship which had served the Liverpool-Calcutta route in peacetime.

My dear Mother,

It is an unGodly hour, this cool May morning. A 1st sergeant's whistle blows three times, all in the barracks stretch themselves, then get up and make their rolls. They are about to begin a long journey, from which many of them may never return. We have now left the barracks so quietly that those across the street do not know we have gone. After a walk we board a train, every one is happy, we speed on few people are aware of our movement, no train whistles are blown, here and there are to be seen an occasional pair of old
women gossiping over the fence, they pause and wave at us. In due course of time we detrain.

Our outfit is quartered on an enclosed pier our packs are taken off. The Red Cross (the best friend of the American soldier) ladies give us elegant hot coffee and still better buns, with raisins in them. Many of the men stretch themselves out on the floor and go to sleep. Others roam around in the enclosure. The Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross give us safe arrival cards, which we fill out. Now the entire floor of this large pier is covered with men writing their good by or their safe arrival cards. I wrote no good by, because I thought it better you got a safe arrival card first.

Our ship has now come in. Packs are put on and the men commence to move on up the gang planks. The crew are [Hindus], quite a novelty for us, from the costumes of some we might imagine them to be women, their ways are very peculiar. The officers are traveling first class. Lt. [Edgar C.] Keiser from B Co and I have a state-room together, an ideal one, everything so complete, nice dainty little rose figured curtains at the port hole and around your berth, folding wash stands, comfortable berths and the like. Oh! it is great, such a nice clean place to fight this war, and it will be our home for some days to come.

The officers also have a dining room, smoking and music rooms, as well as other necessities.

The eating is elegant, chicken, fish, rabbit, butter, fresh bread, olives, cheese, raisins, cake, beef, pork etc. are common occurrences. The waiters are [Hindus], wearing large flat white caps, thin white shirt waists, (very feminine) a sort of light shirt with several slits in it (still more feminine than the shirt waists) around their waists they wear a girdle of white, they are very attentive, watch every move you make, and can understand you when you ask for something to eat. . . . Lt. Keiser is sitting on the bunk all smiles a heavy bearded [Hindu] is lathering his face, after he has finished shaving him the Lieutenant asks how much and the [Hindu] replies as you like Suh, and that was all you could get out of him upon receiving some money he kisses it and backs out of the door all smiles and bows. A [Hindu] prepares a bath for you Oh it is fine every place you look there is a squatting [Hindu] waiting to do something for you.

Our boat is now moving down a river numerous people on ferry boats wave good by to us. A battleship passes us going in the opposite direction. The band plays "Over There" then "Good By Broadway Hello France."
Several days go by uneventful. Every morning I am wakened by the Lackey calling Suh, Suh, coffee. We have a light breakfast in bed about 7:30. A real one out of bed at 9. Lunch at 1 P.M. Tea at 4 P.M. Dinner at 7 P.M. We are very stylish.

Some few of the men are now feeding the fishes, it is a circus to watch them, either the ocean or buckets are very much in demand. One fellow advised his fish feeding friend to eat a piece of fat meat, along comes another one and suggests a pickle, the next fellow says eat just what you like and along comes another one and advises the fish feeder to eat nothing; during all this prescribing the fish are getting a wonderful meal. You can see the men jumping out of their bunks and make a run for a bucket, after using it they look around to see some other fellow in the same fix, and the fellow that has just finished laugh at his companion. It is amusing to watch them. None of them are real sick they only feed the fish once or twice a day.

The weather has so far been ideal. Many of the men appear on deck in their shirt sleeves.

A few more days go by, the weather is ideal practically no one is now sick. It is most interesting to watch the [Hindus]. They keep our section of the ship immaculate.

The weather has now become quite cold. Nothing of particular interest passes. The weather continues cold, I am still having my first breakfast in bed, it surely is fine. This is a fine little ship.

We have a fresh vegetable garden aboard (tomatoes, lettuce etc). Fresh or salt fish every meal (we catch them as we go on) Elegant meats of all kinds. Figs, raisins, oranges grapefruit which we have to fix our selves, English walnuts, peanuts, cream nuts and the like but our cow went to shore some where in N.Y. and broke into a school house and ate a lot of chalk as a result our milk and cream, both the same only a difference of name, are a bit weak (chalk water).

Still some more days pass and land we see not.

Today (just two weeks ago we were waiting in a North Eastern American pier) land, (though mighty barren and hilly) is sighted. Tomorrow we will, if no mine or submarine interferes, be at our dock. A foreign sea port.

I hope to be able to mail this letter as soon as we go ashore. I have had a wonderful trip. Have not been a bit sick. Feel as though I had put on twenty pounds, due to sleeping and eating alone.
Shoemaker’s battalion arrived at Liverpool on 16 May. From Liverpool the battalion traveled by train to Dover, England, from where it sailed across the English Channel.

May 1918

My dear Mother,

No doubt you are worrying yourself sick about me, but there is really no need of it as I am having the time of my life. This country [England] is all new to us and there is so much of interest to us. A trip like the one I am having now would cost so much that it would probably be a number of years before I could take it, then there would not be one tenth so much experience. I am perfectly willing to take a chance, probably an awful chance, to get this experience, but it is worth any kind of chance. If I am fortunate enough to come home alive after the war I will be able to handle any kind of job, a better man than any one that has not been in the war, if I don’t come back, I will of first had a chance to see the country, have a good time, and be an American soldier in the World War, and when the Huns get me I will have at least an even break of getting to Heaven as I have been behaving myself pretty well. However I would much prefer coming back to the States for sixty years and then going to Heaven.

I am having a fine time in a first class compartment car looking at the most beautiful country, the inhabitants, and eating a lunch which I bought before leaving the boat, at the same time thinking of the ones at Home. It was great.

The country here is magnificent, every patch that is cultivated is taking care of to the very best of care, the woods are clean, the pastures beautiful and filled with the very best stock. Every inch of ground has its special use, there is absolutely no waste, even the sides of the railroads that are not too steep are cultivated.

Every one here is doing her or his bit. Women are doing all kinds of work, and the men are by no means taken from this country.

The weather is ideal, this is a beautiful spring morning. This is the third spring for me this year.

One place I went thru yesterday brought back to my mind vividly my high school days, a much talked of little town, one that Miss Fauble and Miss Taylor worried me about more than once. The town looked beautiful, much more beautiful than they (Misses
Fauble and Taylor) could make it in that high school room back in Bellefonte Pa. . . .  

I spent the winter in the Southern states of the U.S.A. now I am touring Europe this summer, having a fine time, seeing the sights and traveling first class, at the same time having a wonderful experience. . . .

Shoemaker's battalion arrived at Calais, France, on 19 May and, after a short stay at a rest camp, went to Picardy, where the division trained under British supervision until 9 June.

May 1918

My dear Mother,

Arrived on French soil today. Things are very interesting here. It is a good thing interpreters are numerous, as my French vocabulary is limited to about six words, all of which mean only goodnight, please Miss and Mr., and one or two more.

Had a fine time in the rest camp we have just left. . . .

The American soldiers create a lot of sensation here, particularly among the children. . . .

I am indeed having the time of my life, this is surely a wonderful trip, so much of interest to see. If there is anything left of me, I am going to see the world after the war, and I am going to see a great deal of it at Uncle Sam's expense, he surely takes good care of us, gives his Officers the best going. . . .

It is fun to hear the men talking to the French people, both have an awful time of it.

The money is also quite confusing. Practically everything is very much cheaper in this country than in the U.S. . . .

May 23, 1918

My dear Mother,

I sure am having the time of my life, there are so many interesting things to do and see here.

We left our rest camp and are now quartered in billets. I am mighty glad for the change as our rest camp was not nearly as clean and beautiful as where we are now.

I had a good time at the rest camp, and in the evening there was plenty of excitement. When not eating or sleeping I sat in the officer's
lounge room, trying to talk French to the bar maid and listening to officers trying to make the maid understand what they wanted to buy, it sure was interesting and of all the words and ways of saying them. Fortunately the girl was very good natured and tried her best to help us out, she understands about as much English as I do French, so we always welcomed the officer that could speak French.

After leaving the rest camp we went thru some of the most beautiful country you have ever seen. The season is right well advanced and of all the beautiful colors the red roofs of the houses add so much to the scenery.

When we got to the station, we were met by a guide and we marched along beautiful roads, hedged with magnificent trees, and wonderful grapevines. Along the road were numerous large crucifixes. Though it was night the moon was shining very brightly and we could see a great deal. Thank God this country shows no signs of the frightful savage of German Kulture, and may God Almighty forbid that the destructive hand of the Germans shall ever mar this magnificent scenery, with its beautiful churches, the wonderful crucifixes, the productive soil and the hard laboring women. It is sure a wonderful country.

Lt. Butts [Lieutenant Joseph C. Butterworth] and I are quartered in a dear little French farm. When we came in very early this A.M. a middle aged French women was waiting for us. She showed us our room. It is a very nice one, two large high soft beds with very soft mattresses, nice white sheets and plenty of covers, there is some furniture in the room, and the walls, mantles etc are covered with statues, holy pictures, crucifixes, rosaries etc. There is a very large handsome rosary carved out of wood over our beds. The floors are concrete or tile lightly covered with white sand.

You ought to hear me talking French now. I think I will get a job teaching French in some girls school after the war. Our land lady seems to have an awful time understanding my pronunciation. Interpreters are scarce here so we must speak in French for everything we want. I have a pocket French book, a fair imagination, between signs, feeling, pointing, the book and my imagination I make out pretty well. . . .

May 25, 1918

My dear Mother,

I am now attending a M.G. [machine gun] school somewhere in beautiful France. It is to last for two weeks I then go back to in-
struct the Co. We are under British instructors here. We are living in tents but I have my cot and bedding roll so I am most comfortable. As usual I am enjoying myself greatly.

I have seen a great deal of aircraft since coming to this country. They are so common, I don't bother to look at them. Some days ago I heard several German planes.

The enlisted men all seem glad to be here; as long as they get something to eat they are happy.

To date the much talked of cooties (bugs) have not put in an appearance.

May 28, 1918

My dear Mother,

Saturday night I went to confession in French. Lt. [David L.] Miller who is in our Co is also a Catholic and he knows about as much French as I do. We went up to the town hall and happened to find a woman who had an English-French dictionary. We both got together and in less than an hour had it figured out and written down. It required the dictionary, my little red French book, a trifle of Latin, Lt. Miller's aid and some imagination to figure out my story and about the same for Lt. Miller's. I helping him out. After writing down both stories we started out to find a priest, after talking to an old man several women and a little boy we found the priest. I went in first I started in English then he put on his specks, read my story and I finished in English. Lt. Miller was next; after he finished we both talked to the priest for about one half an hour. Every word was in French the little red book and both of our imaginations came in very good. We would of stayed longer but it got too dark to use the little red French book. The priest offered us a drink of wine before we left we drank to France, he proposing it in French. It is the first time I was ever offered wine for going to confession. It was indeed quite a novel experience. The priest was quite old, tall and slim moreover very good natured and quite amused with us. There are six American officers billeted in his house.

Nothing would taste as good as a dish of ice cream it seems to be entirely an American dish.

Men are conspicuous on account of their absence, and pretty girls are scarcer than the men, but the beautiful scenery and elegant looking stock in the fields make up for both.
My dear Mother,

Not much news since my last letter. We are now working very hard and have very little time to ourselves.

It is a common sight to see the women working in the fields and doing other heavy labor, they, indeed, deserve a lot of credit.

Milk is very plentiful here, and quite cheap about five cents a quart, eggs come next in abundance, bread is a bit hard to get, it is sure fine bread huge loaves five inches thick and two and one half feet wide, when you buy a meal a French woman takes the loaf up into her arms and butters a slice, then cuts it in half and folds the two buttered slices together. Water is quite scarce, that is drinking water, we get it in water carts after the water has been cured (treated with a mixture of chemicals) of course there are neither ice cream stores or soda water fountains in the village where we are now stationed.

June 1, 1918
This school is quite hard on my French. I think I will have to go to confession soon, so I can rehearse my French with the priest; then too when I go to Holy Communion and the woman who runs the hotel? or boarding house? or something like that, sees me there she gives me an extra good meal. You have to be a good Catholic before she will give you anything worth while, and an extra good one if you go to Holy Communion.

I am enjoying myself greatly, there is always something worth while going on. If things go too quiet "Jerry" comes over and drops bombs eight or nine miles from here, then our anti aircraft guns bring a couple of "Jerrys" down. It is very interesting to watch the flash lights, bursting shrapnel and the flashes from the guns in the heavens....

June 4, 1918

My dear Mother, ....

I always carry medals and rosaries with me. For at least two reasons: One reason it helps me to keep on good terms with the Lord, and the second it helps me to keep on good terms with the French inhabitants. Show an old French woman (there are plenty of them) your rosary or medals and you will never go hungry, get thirsty or sleep out in the open....

The census of opinion around these parts is that the Boche will quit before the end of the year, personally it does not make any difference to me if we all keep on going, provided he (the Boche) misses me....

June 12, 1918

My dear Collins [brother],....

We see lots of airplanes a short distance from where we are now are lots of lots of large tanks....

Yesterday when we got to our billets and got fixed up, I went down to the creek for a bath (A French luxury) all along the stream were men sitting down hunting for Cooties (bugs) Some were found.

If you get a chance read "Over the Top" by Empey. It is true to life. When you read about the Cooties think of us....

This is a pretty good war, different from the Mexican Border war, and a little more strenuous than the Augusta Georgia war....

In mid-June the Keystone Division was transferred to the French front, and in late June, now attached to the French Sixth Army, it entered the line, occupying second positions in the Chateau-Thierry sector on the south face of the Marne Salient.

June 13, 1918

My dear Mother,

Left machine gun school Saturday....

Sunday we started on a hike South to another training camp. The further South we go the better looking is the country. We have covered lots of country everything is beautiful.

I told you about my tummy’s disappearing, well I know where it has gone, part to my legs, they are like iron, and the rest to my shoulders for on them rides my shelter half, toilet articles, blanket, underclothes, sox, French book, iron rations (bully beef hard tack, extra hard, and coffee) and a few other necessities, all known as a pack. We are all in wonderful physical condition, as strong as an ox and well sun burnt. You have no idea how healthy and tough we are. We are semi-barbarians, it will take some time after the war before we can settle down. I am quite an expert walker now, and seeing France the right way, slow and by foot....

When we walk through these towns there are always a couple dozen children hanging on to us and it is surprising to see the women, particularly the older ones, weep as we pass by. They look at us, we from far off America, as their liberators. The French have a very warm spot in their hearts for the Sammies (American Soldiers)....

June 21, 1918

My dear Mother,....

The country about here is most beautiful but this town [Gonesse] is anything but clean. Sanitary conditions are not good among the French. I very much dislike the bucket system.

Since the Y.M.C.A. located near us we are able to buy American cakes, candy etc. they certainly taste good. The Y.M.C.A does very good work for the soldiers when they are in the field....

June 25, 1918

My dear Mother,

Talk about traveling in style, well that is my middle name, Sunday I had a long ride in a Pierce Arrow of course it was a truck but it
also was a Pierce Arrow truck. It was a long ride, we went thru some very beautiful country and several cities along the road everyone stopped to wave at us, old women wept and numerous people threw beautiful roses and other flowers at us as we passed. The French make a great fuss over us. Along the road I saw a French man and woman; neither had a bath for at least ten years, the man never shaved and the woman had yards of hair on her head. . . .

To see the different troops, just reminds us of a big circus parade, everything is there even the clowns. . . .

I have run across the first ungrateful inhabitants of France. They own the place where we are billeted, they have lots of money, but the soldiers here cant hardly move without him raising red. I don't wish the old fellow any bad luck but if the long range guns put a few holes in his roof after we pass I wont object. . . .

I was at Confession and Holy Communion yesterday evening. Did not fast. We in the field can go to Holy Communion any time without fasting. . . .

Have seen quite a few French soldiers they are the most friendly of our Allies. . . .

June 29, 1918

My dear Mother. . . .

I like the French better each day. But when it is all said and done there is nothing like America, American people (women girls and ladies included) American eats, American brains, American supplies, American ice cream, American soldiers, American sermons, American language, American games American homes and last but not least American chocolate (blame the French chocolate) and American Latrines. . . .

June 29, 1918

My dear Martha, . . .

Does _______ get the yellow stripe this year or hasn't Congress decided to give the swiveled chair-loving ordnance heroes in Washington and the United States a distinguishing mark for their white collar and cuff bravery? This does not apply particularly to _______, he could not be used over here, . . . but there are lots in the States and back of the lines here, that really ought to be taking their chances on pushing up daisies with the rest of us, and not in the Q.M. [Quartermaster] or ordnance departments.
My dear Mother.

For the first time in my life I have more money (Francs) than I know what to do with, my pay for June after rations, insurance, and Liberty loan deduction I received 822F. Hope to be able to send it all home. Money seems to last here.

Today Sunday I was at Mass. The church was very pretty. Altar boys wore red caps, capes and cassocks with white surpluses. The sermon was in French, but judging from the priest’s delivery and voice it must of been a very good one.

Several days ago I gave a French corporal a pair of my sox, a real act of charity, he lost his when in the trenches and had been several weeks without any. He could speak good English, and was well pleased. His home was captured at the beginning of the war by the Germans, he has not seen his mother nor his father for four years. After the war he is coming to the “US” to make his “life”.

I saw two balloons go up in flames today, the observers escaped in their parachutes.

I am continuing to have an ideal time, so don’t worry about me. I have a 50-50 chance of going either to heaven or to home, both are mighty good places.

My dear Mother,

Have just returned from Mass. Mass was high, the singing was beautiful, men with wonderful voices.

Why do the people in France remain seated during the Nicene Creed, and all of the sanctus? Also why are there two, three or four people taking up a collection all at the same time, all from the same people, but they use different kinds of lifters (containers for the coins, including pans, and red purses). This is one of France’s big holidays [Bastille Day]. The Sammies are also keeping it sleeping and having a good quiet time. Quite a few of the houses have the Allied flags up. The Stars and Stripes are flying very proudly and beautifully right in the center of them all.

Had some elegant canned peaches last night bought them from the Y.M.C.A.

See by “The Stars and Stripes” (an American weekly paper) the K of C [Knights of Columbus] are to start canteens in France.
similar to the Y.M.C.A. but the K of C are going to give theirs away free. The Y.M.C.A. make no profit on theirs.

On 15 July the Germans made their last grasp for victory with attacks in the Chateau-Thierry and Reims sectors. These attacks were successfully blunted by the Allies, and on July 18 the Allies went on the offensive, pushing the Germans back from the Marne to the Vesle River by 6 August. The Keystone Division played a prominent role in these operations, although Shoemaker's battalion was in reserve most of the time.

July 28, 1918

My dear Mother,

The Germans are on the run. They have left hundreds of thousands of tons of all kinds of ammunitions behind them. They retreated so suddenly, they did not even have time to blow them up. The Germans must have figured on going right thru Paris, but the Americans were too much for them.

We now get a Paris edition of the New York Herald daily. It is almost as good as a letter.

What do the American papers have to say about this big Franco-American (mostly American) drive?

Am hoping for some mail tomorrow or the next. Mail comes in now about once a week.

Have just seen an air battle.

July 31, 1918

My dear Mother.

Our major wears a crucifix on a chain around his neck (he is a Lutheran or Presbyterian), lots of non Catholics are wearing medals, crucifixes, etc and quite a few have rosaries around their necks. Men in this company that formerly hated the name Catholic are covered with medals, rosaries, etc. We have a Jew carrying a rosary.

You have probably seen pictures of where churches are shot down and a crucifix is still left, these are not exaggerations, several days ago I went thru some towns that have just been taken from the Huns, along the roads were crucifixes, everything around them was shot up but the figure of Christ was not touched. I saw several where one of the wooden arms was shot off, but the figure was still one.

Tell Collins Lt. Col. [Wallace] Fetzer was killed Sunday.

6. Fetzer, a native of Northumberland County, had been lieutenant colonel of the First Pennsylvania Cavalry. In July 1918, he was assigned to the 110th Infantry Regiment, and on 28 July he and several orderlies were killed when a German shell struck the regimental headquarters.
August 3, 1918

My dear Mother, Martha, Ellen [sister], Augusta [sister], and John [brother].

Thank you all so much for your most welcome letters. They certainly made me feel extra good. There is nothing an American soldier likes better than letters and letters from home. . . .

Weather here is generally nice, rather warm now. Today it is pouring. We are in dugouts in a woods, but are dry. Don’t get scared at dugouts they are all right, Jerry is too busy running to pay any attention to us, but when an occasional one comes over you ought to see the boys disappear from sight, just like rats into a hole when they smell a cat. . . .

Went to Confession last night to a French priest who could speak English, I saw him by the road side and stood right there and went, passing us were thousands of troops, this is not an uncommon sight. After he said “Go and Go in Peace,” I felt as though I could lick a whole German army.

The only way I try to learn French now is by listening and talking to people. The books don’t spell it the way the French pronounce it, it is worse than ours.

Now that we are again on American rations the tummy again appears. . . .

Saw some German prisoners yesterday, one boy not over 13 years old had on a big camouflaged helmet, most of the other men were quite old. There were two officers, very haughty, sorry I was not meaner, for I would have brought them down a peg or two.

Are there any souvenirs any of you want? This country is full of all kinds of German stuff, even haughty Prussian dead warriors. . . .

August 1918

My dear Mother. . . .

Really we are just like a circus, and this is the biggest show on earth that we are in. But unlike the circus as the average person thinks of it, our main idea is not to please the public by our acts but to down Kaiserism and save our own hides at the same time.

I continue to enjoy my self greatly, this is a wonderful life filled with lots of excitement, and wonderful experiences. . . .

The enclosed is a piece of an American aeroplane. Two of them were brought down near us several days ago. They collided with each other up in the sky. One would think there is enough room in the air for airplanes without having to bump in to each other. . . .
On 7 August the Keystone Division took over the Fismes sector along the Vesle River and for a month maintained the front line in full view of German gunners on the heights on the north bank.

August 12, 1918

My dear Mama,

You ought to see me now. Had a fine bath yesterday afternoon, the bathroom was a woods, the tub a bucket I heated the water and then went to it; sure felt good, water is scarce here. I did not find one. One what? Why a cootie. There are lots of them in this woods but I could not find any on myself. Lots of the men have them....

Haven't had rain for several days now, so the mud is almost dried up. It was frightful.

There is a French lieutenant attached to our company now, do not know how long we are to have him. He is going to teach me some French. Where we are now there are no French inhabitants; I have not seen a hundred French soldiers in the last two weeks.

Jerry is now on the run in Northern France. Do not think he can last much longer.

Saw one place where the Germans had to disband a railroad train (cars engine and all). You have no idea of the vast amount of supplies of all kinds and munitions the Germans left behind them in their big retreat. They left everything behind from baby carriages to big German cannons. Along the roads and in the woods are car loads, yes train loads of ammunitions which the Germans were not able to take back with them; now the Allies are sending that same ammunition back at the Huns.

Have seen many wonderful sights, experiences of a lifetime. Sights I would of hated to have missed and odors I wish I had missed....

Two days ago I saw a wonderful airplane fight. One Jerry came over, then our anti/aircraft guns opened up. Then an Allied plane came on the scene and the anti/aircraft guns ceased to fire. After the two planes did some fancy stunts eighteen planes Allied and Hun dropped out of the clouds and a battle royal was waged; for more than a half hour I watched it. Several Huns were sent to earth. The planes flew upside down, on their sides, nose down tail down, loop the loop, side ways and every other way. Lots of Americans right out in Pittsburgh would of given a thousand dollars just to see that scrap in Pittsburgh. I saw it in France and it did not cost me a cent....
Now dont worry about me. I am perfectly well and happy and not in undue danger. The Lord will take care of me. There are lots of people in the U.S. getting killed. We are now leading better lives. Protestants that never even thought of God are now reading the Bible daily. Our own boys (Catholics) are equally as good.

The men from the N.G. [National Guard] are the best fighters over here they are really doing better and harder fighting than our regular army. This is an acknowledged fact over here.

August 14, 1918

My dear Collins,

The Marines did some fine work before the drive started but the real fighters are the National Guardsmen, prominently among them are the 28th (Pa.) New England and a division from Missouri and Wisconsin, they sure gave the Huns a run for their money. They are better fighters than our regulars and the drafted men are not in it with us.7

Talking about airplanes, we see some real shows over here. The triangle you speak of is probably the famous diamond formation. Used by battling planes.

Tanks are British—are doing some good work. They work in connection with the cavalry. The cavalry was an important factor in this drive.

I am not mounted we are supposed to be motorized. Have some of our trucks but not all. Have only four horses two in water cart and two horses for the kitchen.

Nothing like a bath every day. Often impossible to get one once a week.

Crabs, they are different than Cooties. At cooty looks like a grain of wheat on numerous legs, they are very common over here. No cure for them, only pick them off and squash them then others come to the Funeral.

The boys over here at $1 per day plus 20% foreign service pay are right well off, because it is all saved money. You cant spend much up here.

7. In addition to the Keystone Division Shoemaker is referring to the 26th Division, which was made up of the New England National Guard, and the 32d Division, which was made up of the Wisconsin and Michigan National Guards. Except for those serving as replacements in Regular Army or National Guard divisions, draftees were assigned to National Army divisions. The first of these divisions did not enter the line until August 1918.
August 16, 1918

My dear Mother. . . .

Weather is now beautiful. Moon light nights are a curse though. Read "Horrors of a Moon Light Night" in June 22nd Saturday Evening Post. It is correct. I have been thru it, and rather enjoy the excitement. . . .

Every one here (good, bad and indifferent) thinks a lot more about the after world than he ever did in his life before.

We have lots of flies here, they must be German for they can sure bite. . . .

On 7 September the Keystone Division crossed the Vesle in pursuit of the Germans, who were now retreating to the Aisne River. On 8 September the division was relieved and sent to the rear for twelve days. On 20 September the division, now attached to the American First Army, reentered the line in preparation for the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

[September 1918]

[My dear Mother]. . . .

Prayers are said pretty fast, at times faster than others depending on the frequency of the Boche artillery, machine gun and other fire. . . .

It is pretty hard to ask an American soldier who has seen action not to have bitterness against the Hun, everytime I pass their graves—very frequently I say a little prayer for them, I think they the Huns will got to heaven, but some of them will get a singling. All soldiers killed on the field have a quiet calm peaceful smile on their faces. . . .

Thanks to almighty God we are now being relieved. Going back to that part of France which has not been scarred by battle and I am one of the fortunate ones going back for a well earned rest. Only four slight casualties in this Co. . . .

September 9, 1918

Dear Mother, . . .

I sure have seen the trenches, but they are not elaborate systems of trenches as you probably imagine. You see it is sort of open warfare, positions change so often, neither side is able to dig completely

in. But every time we stop any place even for a few minutes the shovel comes in good. I can't say they unnerve me, but anyone that even gets up to them is more or less scared, but not frightened to death by any means, after a time the fear leaves. . . .

September 12, 1918

My dear Martha, . . .

God forbid that you ever know what mustard gas is. It is awful the burn frightful. Quite a bit of it has been captured by the Allies and used on the Boche, then it is fine stuff, provided we don't get in it right away. . . .

Thanks to Almighty God we are now coming out of the lines, and I am among them. It is a treat for my eyes to again see beautiful France, children and houses that are not wrecked, for for two months they have seen little less than death, agony and destruction. . . .
September 12, 1918

My dear Mother, . . .

Yesterday I took a run over to Epernay. It is some place, the first city I have seen for more than two months. There we can buy almost anything imaginable, but no ice cream. They have wonderful markets there, everything reasonable, fruits and vegetables. . . . I bought some fruit meat, vegetables and a pocket knife, latter has a can opener most essential over here. . . .

I am living in a house just down the street from the Captain’s. A fine big room and a high bed with plenty of covers and white sheets on it. I sure did sleep did not get up til 9 A.M. Not such a bad war, is it?

We are the first Americans to go thru these parts, as a result the inhabitants can not do enough for us.

There are lots of little children here, we are most popular with them. It is great to see them. . . .

Have just returned from making a little visit over at the church. It is a beautiful church, half as large as ours in Bellefonte. It is the cleanest neatest church I have ever been in quite a treat to see a church that is not blown to pieces, I have seen many of them. The Boche love to destroy them. . . .

September 22, 1918

My dear Mother, . . .

On July 18, the major, other officers and myself went out to reconnoiter; the place we went to was a hell; the wounded were being brought it, there were dead Americans and Boche lying around, shells were bursting all around us, the noise was awful and the odor equal. Well up towards the front was a priest, an army chaplin, burying the dead. He was by himself, performing this duty without fear. The major stopped and talked to him for some time. The priest evidently gave him a wonderful talking to, for since then he is a better man, and goes to Mass regularly. . . .

My French is progressing very rapidly. I am more than pleased by the use of my hands, I can speak fairly well, understand it better, get the sense out of a French newspaper, but I will be blamed if I can write, their spelling is not a bit like my or any one else's pronunciation. . . .

The Meuse-Argonne offensive began on 26 September and until 8 October the Keystone Division slugged it out with the Germans with almost continuous action for all units.
My dear Mother, . . .

I have seen a few American newspapers printed in July, the accounts given in them are somewhat flowery, are quite true, there is no doubt but that the Boche is getting his due.

From July 15 to August 30 the prisoners taken on the fronts in France amounted to 128,000 and to every one prisoner, there were five casualties, of course not that high a percentage of deaths, but none of them would be fit for service for three months, many of them never, and lots of them are pushing up daisies just now. So you see they can not last long, of course they are not yet finished, but they can never win.

Every now and then an officer or officers from the A.E.F. are sent home for three months as instructors. ________ was one of them. He went over the top several times in the second battle of the Marne and of course he is now spreading the bull in Bellefonte Pa., and other foreign parts. I do not blame him. I will have an awful line when I get back. . . .

No . . . I am in no danger over here—the front line left me this A.M. You have read about the new drive which started this A.M. . . .

By this time you have no doubt heard that _________ had made the supreme sacrifice. One of the Boche shells hit him. I feel very sorry for his people, but he has gone for a good cause. He lived about 10 minutes after the explosion. . . .

September 27, 1918

My dear Martha, . . .

Will be able to send you a helmet now, there is a drive on now, sent Ellen one this A.M. her request was here first, you are next one. None of the helmets have a spike on top of them, they are only pictured that way. The peace helmet which is made out of leather does have a spike and, the war helmet of the Crown Prince Hindenburg and several more of the highest command wear the spike helmets, but is not worn by any other ranks. . . .

Saw quite a few German prisoners yesterday, most of them were old worn out men. Germany is losing lots of them now. . . .

9. Shoemaker is referring to Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, commander-in-chief of the German Army.
September 30, 1918

My dear Mother, . . .

I . . . often wonder where the Huns all came from. Wonder if the German women might be grandmothers about once every week or so. They are now getting scarce. So far the only ones taken in this drive are quite old. I do not expect anymore trouble from Russia now. Do not expect or want to be there. Austria is practically finished. Neither Austria, Germany, Turkey nor any of that bunch can make another drive. Germany's morale is broken, this I can easily see. . . .

I am in a dugout right now, the Germans were in it two days ago. They left a lot of canned fire in it. I am going to take a dozen cans with me. Rats are common, and cooties, other bugs and vermin are extremely plentiful this season, they do not bother me in the least. Have no insect powder. The best way to get rid of them is to have a cooty hunt; sit down take off your clothes pick them off then go over your body thoroughly, just like a monkey looking for fleas. . . . It will soon be too cold to take off my clothes, so by next spring I should have a right good supply of all breeds. . . .

October 4, 1918

My dear Mother, . . .

Do not see how anyone could be pro-German. I do not want to see a German after the war. I guess you will say I am bitter but it is not much wonder. . . .

Captain [Wilbur F.] Leitzell [company commander] was wounded the other day, but not really seriously; hope he will be able to return in a month or so. Would hate to see him taken away from us now. He knows machine guns and machine gunnery from A to Z. Butts . . . being my senior is in command of the company. I am in charge of the kitchen and the train. . . .

The Keystone Division was relieved on 8 October and sent to a rest area for a week. On 15 October, now attached to the American Second Army, it reentered the line in the Thiaucourt-Toul sector.

October 13, 1918

My dear Mother,

We are again back for a rest. After another hard drive, which cost us a few men. Captain Leitzell will be in the hospital for about
six weeks from the time he was wounded. But the Boche lost far more than we did. It was a most expensive drive for them. Most of the prisoners taken from them were old worn out men.

Yesterday I went to an American hospital to take a bath, it was a fine place, and an elegant bathplace—which I greatly enjoyed. Also had a cup of hot chocolate made by a pretty American canteen worker. Prepare for a jolt. It lacked only a few hours of being exactly one full month since my last bath so you can see it was more or less welcome. . . . Incidentally I am going to be a daily bather after I land in the States. Never again will I turn my nose at a bath. This is the longest period since coming here that I have been without a bath, but the weather is getting cool now.

From present indications the war will soon be finished so you will soon be able to quit worrying about me. Its Phil for the . . . farm for the duration of my life and bath at least once a day.

My dear Mother,

I have been slightly wounded and cant use my hands.10 Please dont worry about me. I will be all right soon. It is really nothing serious. I am in a lovely hospital with real American nurses. I was brought in night before last. I will tell you all about it when I can write myself. The Red Cross lady is writing this for me. I shall not be able to write as often as usual.

October 19, 1918

My dear Mother,

I am getting along fine. I've got an elegant doctor whose name is Major [George M.] Dorrance. He lives in Phila. and is doing some wonderful work on my hands and neck. The nurses are fine to me. I keep them awful busy but I really can't help it.

This is a very nice hospital [Evacuation Hospital #1]. I cant tell you much about the location as I've only seen about a hundred yds. of it on a stretcher every morning.

There is an elegant band here and they give at least one glorious concert every day. It sure helps break the monotony as time seems to hang a bit heavy. I will be all right. So please don't worry about me. . . . The Huns are getting it a lot worse than we are.

October 22, 1918

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10. Shoemaker was wounded on 17 October 1918, near Jaulny.
My dear Mother,

I am getting along fine and am now able to walk about. I only had to stay in bed one week. As yet I do not have the use of my hands. I only have one thumb out and it works over time but it will not be long until they are working again. Major Dorrance is doing some wonderful work on me—a doctor never looked better to me and an operating table was most grateful the night I came in. I used to think they were awful but my opinion is altogether different now. . . .

The war up the line is, I am afraid, over for me as a boy with a pair of bungled up hands cant do much fighting but can do lots of good in the back areas—and dont let this worry you because I'll only have a stiff wrist for the next two months or so, so you see it is not so bad after all. . . .

[November 1918]

My dear Mother,

Following is the complete history of me from the time I was wounded up until [I entered the hospital]....

Was riding in a Ford truck not far from the front line, and in all probability within view of the Boche artillery, and I know for a certainty within range for two or more shells dropped right along side of us getting me in five different places. Can not express the feeling of being shot, except to say it is a very peculiar and anything but a pleasant one. I did not know I was hit until I saw the lots of blood. The car was stopped quickly I jumped off, fell, then managed to get behind some dirt and stones pulled up about 6 feet high. Behind this barrier I made myself as small as possible and prayed faster and harder than I ever prayed before; the shells kept coming over by the dozens and there was no time lost between the dozens. I kept on praying, each prayer was said faster than the preceding one. After a ½ hour of hard shelling and praying the Boche and I let up. Fortunately I found a first aid station not very far away. Here I was tagged and given first aid.

The two men—[George I.] Smithers and [George W.] Lauck—who were with me were also fixed up here. Smithers got in the head—was the least serious. Lauck was wounded in the shoulder and chest not serious.

From here we were taken to a field hospital in the Ford, where we got the tetanus shot then we were loaded on an ambulance and sent to another field hospital where I was put in a church,
the main idea to wait until they got an ambulance full. Here a Red Cross lieutenant took a liking to me and helped me out.

I must of been there several hours, finally I was put on a stretcher, covered up and loaded on an ambulance, my stretcher was the top one. Over the worst road in the world went our ambulance, when the ambulance went up hill I slid down, when it went down hill, I slid up, most of my sliding was down to make matters worse the stretcher closed with me, making me just a bit more uncomfortable. After the worst ride of my life wc reached Evacuation Hospital No. 1.

Here I was unloaded, and carried into the receiving ward, I was quickly undressed most of my clothes were cut off and my history taken....

November 13, 1918

My dear Mother,

Am continuing to improve, thanks to everyone, particularly the nurses.

Tomorrow makes four weeks in hospitals for me, and I am not well yet, so you see I can still live the life of Riley.

France is overjoyed at the good news [signing of the Armistice]. It’s a very different nation than it was when we landed last May.

There is not much news here, expect to be sent some base hospital along the coast soon....

November 21, 1918

My dear Mother,...

I made a name for myself on the Vesle, but these wounds I am sorry to say robbed me of a captaincy....

Am perfectly contented and getting along fine. My wrist is almost healed but it will be a long time before it works again. Do not worry for all comes to him who waits and I will continue to live the life of Riley for several months yet....

December 7, 1918

My dear Mother,

Am still at Brest, the wettest muddiest, dirtiest place in France, but I am contented, it’s never so bad what it might not be worse. I had hoped to get home for Xmas—I being no good to the U.S. over here—but I have given up all hope; there don’t seem to be any boats here for us, and to make matters worse there are not
prospects for any for some time, but at that it is better to spend Xmas in a hospital rather than fighting up in the front line....

I am just crazy to get back to nature, where you can watch and make things grow. I am well fed up on the killing game, and am most anxious to start making things grow and animáls reproduce. It fairly rings in my ears....

Shoemaker returned to the United States on the LaFrance, landing in New York City on 24 December 1918. He immediately entrained for Pittsburgh and was able to join his family in Wilkinsburg for Christmas dinner the following day. In the succeeding months he underwent treatment for his wounds and was discharged from active duty on 10 May 1919. After the war Shoemaker briefly worked in several jobs and then returned to the Boalsburg area to farm and operate a general store. “Now at last,” as he wrote this editor, “I could grow many different kinds of vegetation, breed, watch and develop many different species of animals such as cows, horses, sheep, pigs, chickens and ducks. What I wanted most to do!”


SUPPLY PROBLEMS, 1776

Philadelphia, 26 Oct. 1776

With all the Clothing that can be collected in several States, and imported, We shall not I am afraid have more than sufficient to cloath our Armies. Hang well and pay well, is a good military Maxim. In paying well I presume Cloathing and Food is involved, otherwise they ought to be subjoined. The former, Congress attended to in their last Articles of War, and I hope their Resolutions respecting the latter will be carried into Execution by those to whom the Execution thereof hath been committed.


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